

The Case for Bombing

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Pentagon Experts Cite Evidence That Raids Reduce U.S. Casualties

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Renewed suggestions that the United States bombings of North Vietnam and Laos be halted are strongly opposed by the armed services.

Senior officers, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last week that unless such a halt in bombing of Communist sanctuaries and supply lines were

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accompanied by a halt in the infiltration of enemy replacements and supplies into South Vietnam, the price paid would be more American casualties. The efforts to halt the flow through Laos and on the various trails across the demilitarized zone, and the attacks on North Vietnam's communications are related directly by the military to the ground war in the South.

Too-High Expectations Seen

Pentagon sources believe that the public, misled by overenthusiastic statements by a few Air Force officers, expected more dramatic results from the bombings.

The limitations on the bombing campaign have delayed and postponed its effects but nonetheless the Pentagon believes that the results have become more important and that bombing is today a major factor in what has become a war of attrition.

Opponents of the bombing maintain that it has failed to break the resistance of Hanoi, indeed, that it may even have stiffened it, that it has not prevented the strengthening and supplying of Communist forces in South Vietnam, and that it represents a dangerous expansion of the war.

However, Pentagon appraisals of the bombing campaign's effects rebut most of these points.

There has been a definite reduction in the supply tonnages transported, by various means, into South Vietnam from the North, they say.

United States intelligence experts believe the North Vietnamese-Vietcong main force units in the South require about 150 tons of supplies a day—chiefly in ammunition and weapons.

The intelligence experts relate the infrequency of major Communist operations earlier this year to supply inadequacies.

Various sources estimate that the supply tonnages have been reduced to 90 tons a day, or perhaps 75 tons, and there were some indications that, during August, this was reduced to 50 tons.

These authorities believe that

the infiltration of North Vietnamese replacements has not been reduced but probably has increased to 4,500 a month, or perhaps 6,000. It is impossible, they say, to prevent small groups of men from traveling underneath the concealing canopy of jungle.

But the men carry only their rifles and a few rounds of ammunition and a little rice, the authorities say, and surveys have found that many arrive in South Vietnam exhausted, malnourished and somewhat demoralized by the constant bombings.

Some prisoners have complained that foodstocks they had been supposed to find at rest stops had not been there.

In North Vietnam, the disruption of railroad, road and water lines of communication has resulted in the diversion of 230,000 to 300,000 men, including 20,000 to 40,000 Chinese railway labor workers, to track-reconstruction, bridge-rebuilding and preparation of alternate routes.

Because of the bombing of transportation bottlenecks, shortages of food, construction materials and other items have been reported intermittently.

A fraction of North Vietnam's electric power facilities, important to industry, transportation and military efforts, has been destroyed by the bombing.

All but 20 per cent of North Vietnam's known petroleum storage facilities have been destroyed.

Attitude Is Unchanged

The bombings so far have produced no change in the insignificant attitude of Hanoi toward peace talks. But Defense Department experts differentiate between the top leadership and the lower-echelon leaders and the people.

They believe that there is now tangible evidence of a demoralizing effect at the lower levels, even though the bombing has been kept away from population centers.

But it may take a long time most authorities agree, for lower-level discontent to influence higher-level decisions.

The bombing, these officials believe, has not seriously increased the risk of a general war. Chinese aid is still limited, and contrary to many predictions, the split between Peking and Moscow has widened as the bombing has intensified.

The case for bombing, in Pentagon thinking, is based upon a military consideration—bombing reduces United States casualties.

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